

NEW RELEASES

JAZZ

Modernistic

Jason Moran
Blue Note
Rating: ★★★½

REVIEWED BY **MARK MILLER**

It was the great stride pianist James P. Johnson (1894-1955) who asserted "You've got to be modernistic" in the title to one of his compositions from about 1930. The young New York pianist Jason Moran responds 70-odd years later with a new version of the Johnson piece, as well as six of his own compositions and items from Muhal Richard Abrams, hip-hop's Afrika Bambaataa and the 19th-century composer Robert Schumann. Moran plays them all succinctly — they average just under four minutes each — but eventfully. He's less a stylist than a storyteller, skilled in matters of mood and pace. (Think of Ran Blake rather than Bud Powell.) His keyboard touch is firm, his preferred sound from the piano rather dark, and his notion of "modernistic" unassumingly provocative.

WORLD/JAZZ

Cuban Odyssey

Jane Bunnett
Bluenote
Rating: ★★★

REVIEWED BY **LI ROBBINS**

What began as a typical escape from negative Celsius temperatures via a Cuban vacation in 1982 became a 20-year exploration of Cuban music by Canadian musicians Jane Bunnett and Larry Cramer. Celebrated by an NFB documentary, *Spirits of Havana*, and supported by this recording, it has thus far been a journey of considerable interest. Bunnett's approach is not that of archivist, or discreet sideman à la Ry Cooder. Hers is a bold integration of her own directions in jazz with Cuban traditions. *Cuban Odyssey* represents a literal voyage as well, with Bunnett and Cramer performing with musicians from around the island. The port city of Matanzas yields a slow building, ultimately fiery collaboration with famed family aggregation Los Munequi-

tos de Matanzas. Cienfuegos provides rollicking, sweet *son* music with Los Naranjos, a band minted in 1926. Most delightfully unexpected are three pieces performed with Camaguey's 10-voice choir, Desandann. Two of the selections have the solemn, uplifting impact of southern American spirituals — with jazz flourishes.

POP

Does This Look Infected?

Sum 41
Aquarius
Rating: ★½

REVIEWED BY

ROBERT EVERETT-GREEN

After a year of storming the stadiums, the lads from Ajax, Ont., have gotten a lot more proficient, and a lot more serious. They've left off singing about the pain of alarm clocks ("Waking up is hard to do") and moved on to a darker shade of adolescent discontent. Wow, the world really is *All Messed Up*. So, unfortunately, are most of these songs. Only the ultra-short abuse ditty *A.N.I.C.*, and the remarkably experimental *Hooch*, have a tune and style that suit the lyrics. In both cases, an air of angry mayhem saves the day, though *Hooch* also wins by making a massive twist out of genre into a startling, down-tempo coda. In all other songs, the band simply Scotch-tapes its bummed-out lyrics onto a series of blandly peppy tunes. Infection? They should be so lucky.

Travelogue

Joni Mitchell
Nonesuch
Rating: ★★

REVIEWED BY

ROBERT EVERETT-GREEN

Joni Mitchell was so thrilled with Vince Mendoza's arrangements for her last disc (for which he received a Grammy nomination) that she asked him to stay tuned for a double album of items from her long career as a songwriter. This hard-bound set features Mendoza versions of 22 Mitchell songs, from the *Circle Game* to *Sex Kills* to *Otis and Marlena*. Mendoza is a thorough craftsman, as is

producer Larry Klein, and the two have spared no effort to provide lavish backgrounds for Mitchell's still arresting voice. But lavish doesn't suit songs like *Woodstock* or *Cherokee Louise*, in which Mitchell's clear-eyed musings about a Manhattan street person are made to sound ridiculously out of touch. Mendoza's versatility — he can do lounge, he can do cool jazz, etc. — is contained within a default idiom that suggests a late remake of Mr. Copland Goes to Hollywood. A few deft items — check out the smooth lounge treatments of *Be Cool* and *You Dream Flat Tires* — can't save a set in which so many fine songs are not merely covered, but euthanized.

CLASSICAL

Reflections

Naida Cole, piano
Decca
Rating: ★★½

REVIEWED BY **ELISSA POOLE**

The French aphorist Malcolm de Chazal wrote that "a mirror has no heart but plenty of ideas." Nothing wrong with that if we're speaking of Maurice Ravel's *Miroirs*, which would never be mistaken for a valentine. Play it as one and it turns to mush. But it is full of ideas, and like many reflections, brighter than the real thing. One of the great liberations of the 20th century was freeing the ear's rise to the surface, up to where texture, colour, light and motion exist for their own sake.

Thus Naida Cole's *Reflections* is aptly titled, for the site of Cole's dazzling artistry is on the surface. She is extraordinarily light-fingered; her bewitching sense of colour makes her a natural for French repertoire; and she keeps her heart well hidden. If her Ravel glittered any more than it does here we would be blinded, and we are happy that it glitters abstractly, free of inappropriate sentiment. But Liszt's *Sonata in B Minor* does not reflect; it absorbs. This is deeper, darker more densely structured music, and Cole, for all her technique, does not plumb the menace, the confrontation, the religious overtones or the bald sentiment that lie beneath and ultimately dominate Liszt's virtuosic surface.